

Application No. 10/663,979

Art Unit: 3714

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NOV 22 2006

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application. Please cancel claims 1-28, without prejudice or disclaimer, and add claims 29-31.

5 **Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-28. (Canceled)

Claim 29. (New) A method of playing a slot machine game using a symbol matrix formed by a plurality of rows intersecting with a plurality of columns, with the plurality of rows and columns including a plurality of symbols, comprising:

- 10 a) a player making a wager to play the game;
- b) randomly rearranging the plurality of symbols;
- c) displaying the rearranged symbols in the symbol matrix;
- d) expanding wildcard symbols, if displayed in the symbol matrix, in the one or more predetermined directions associated with each said wildcard symbol; and
- 15 e) issuing awards for winning symbol combinations following the expansion of all wildcard symbols.

Claim 30. (New) The method of Claim 29 in which a wildcard symbol is assigned one or more of the following predetermined directions:

- a) upwards from the symbol position in which the wildcard symbol appears;
- 20 b) downwards from the symbol position in which the wildcard symbol appears;
- c) leftwards from the symbol position in which the wildcard symbol appears;
- d) rightwards from the symbol position in which the wildcard symbol appears; or
- e) diagonally from the symbol position in which the wildcard symbol appears.

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Claim 31. (New) The method of Claim 29 in which a wildcard symbol expands N symbol positions, from the symbol position in which the wildcard symbol appears towards the predetermined direction(s) assigned to the wildcard symbol, with N calculated in one of the following manners:

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- a) N is a fixed number;
- b) N is a random number; or
- c) N is a random number selected from a range of numbers.